



Coast Guard HR Flag Voice 121

CREATING THE EXCEPTIONAL WORKPLACE -- BUILDING A "STRENGTH-BASED" ORGANIZATION (PART 14)

The Twelve Questions

The importance of employees feeling that they have the materials and equipment they need to do their jobs right.

Question 2: "I have the materials and equipment I need to do my work right."

We have all been in the position of having an expectation put on us and not having had the tools necessary to achieve it. This is a very frustrating position to be in.

The challenge we face in providing the necessary tools in the workplace is how to appropriately match individuals with a wide range of skills and knowledge with the right tools to maximize their potential. If this matching is not thoroughly examined, there can be great cost for the individual, the organization, or both. Many organizations, for example, have come into the computer era boldly and rapidly. Salespeople have been supplied with laptop computers with the idea that computers will help them better manage time, keep accounts organized, communicate with the home office, and so on. But many salespeople don't use them. Companies tend to view this lack of usage as a training issue. So they send the salespeople off to computer school to build a comfort level with computers, and their salespeople end up using them to play solitaire. In other words, sometimes we give people materials and equipment they actually don't need to do their job right.

The best managers shift the decision to the employee. They provide criteria for employees to use in making decisions such as, how is this new tool or piece of equipment going to help: 1) you as an employee, 2) our company, and 3) our customers? This broadens the perspective of the employee, expands clarification on desired outcomes, and builds better communication between individuals and managers. It also takes the manager out of the traditional "parent" role and allows for true ownership and accountability.

Putting people in the roles that best fit who they are.

Question 3: "At work, I have the opportunity to do what I do best every day."

Full human potential is realized only when people are in a position to use their talents and strengths. Great performance is found when an individual's natural talents fit his or her role. Matching the right person with the right job is probably the most significant challenge organizations and managers face today.

Our research found that the best measure of the degree to which employees feel that their talents are being used in their jobs is their level of agreement with the question above. Having an opportunity to "do what I do best every day" is tied to the integration of a person's talents (recurring patterns of thoughts, feelings, and behaviors), skills (what he or she knows how to do), and knowledge (what he or she knows). Talents are those patterns that one cannot turn on and off at will. Great managers realize that, while talents are the differentiating factor in excellent performance, they are also neither created nor altered. In contrast, one's skill sets and knowledge can be impacted and altered.

The best managers see the specific talents needed for every role. Conventional wisdom dictates that some roles are so easy, they don't require talent. Great managers rebuff this belief. The best front desk clerks in a hotel, for example, have a talent for "winning others over." They establish a trust relationship with people within the first 7 seconds of an interaction. Great telephone service and sales personnel are talented in having a "third ear" or the ability to connect visually and emotionally with people they talk to on the phone. Outstanding accountants see patterns in numbers and "hear" a message or story.

Excellence should be revered in every role. Often, we manage from the perspective that because we would not want a particular job or have the talent to perform it well, we must manage it as a job no one would want to do, thus creating a self-fulfilling prophecy. This is, however, a false perspective. The task of the best managers is to clearly define the talents needed for each role, and then choose the right person for that role. A manager's job is not to make people grow talents they do not have, but to identify and utilize existing talents to their fullest potential.

Next: Question #4 of 12: "In the last seven days, I have received recognition or praise for doing good work."

Regards, FL Ames

Excerpted from: *"First Break All the Rules: What the World's Greatest Managers Do Differently."* For more information about the research and book, please refer to web site <http://www.gallup.com/poll/managing/grtwrkplc.asp>.

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